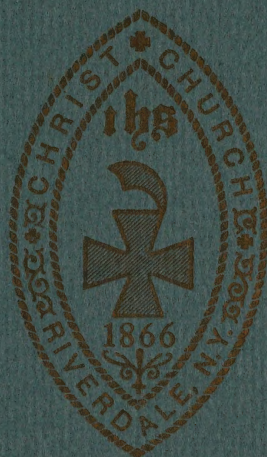


# CHRIST CHURCH

Riverdale-on-Hudson



Seventy-fifth Anniversary

1866—1941





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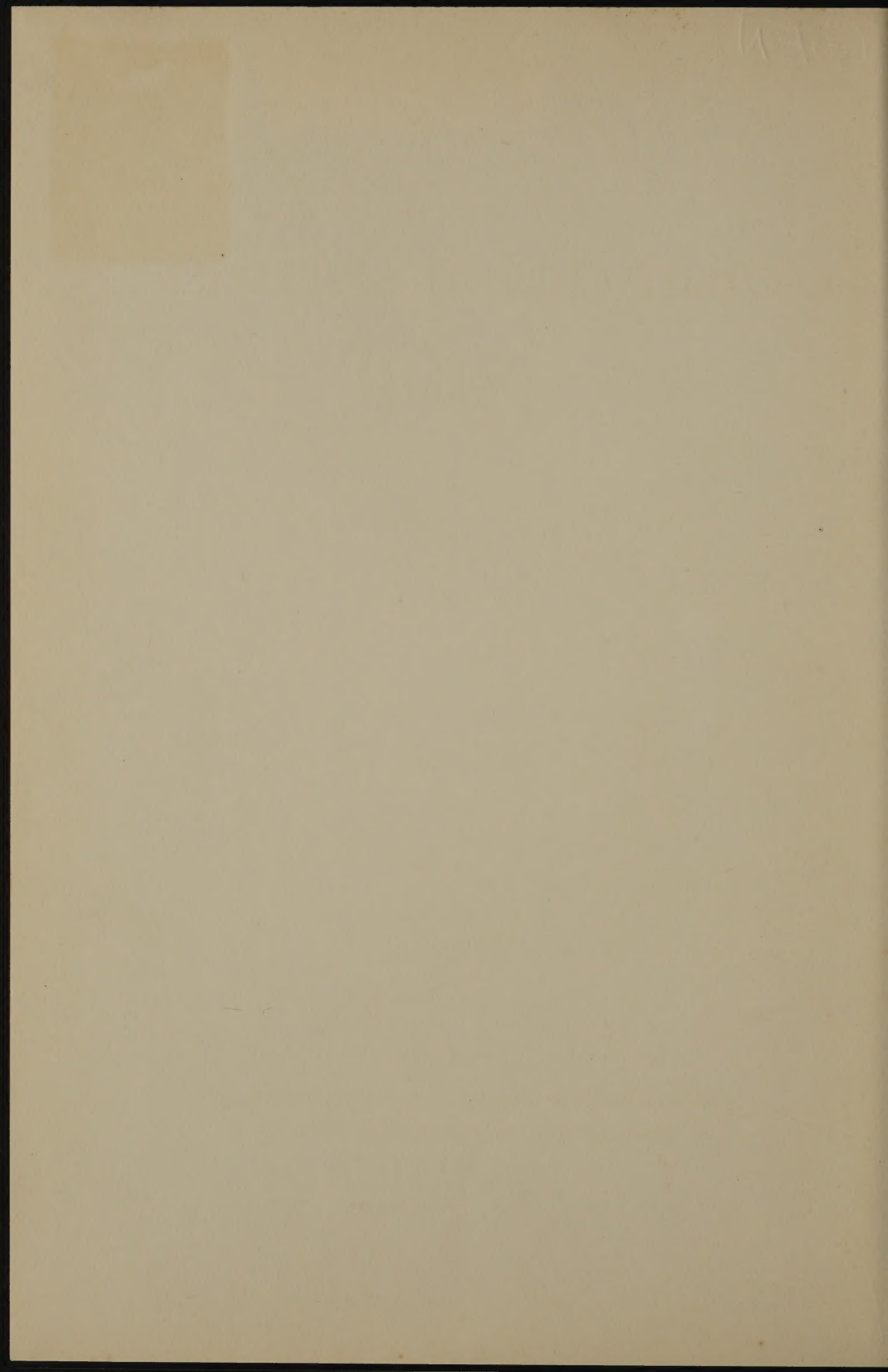


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# CHRIST CHURCH, RIVERDALE

## *A History*

1866 - 1941

Published under the authority of the Rector, Wardens, and  
Vestry of Christ Church, Riverdale-on-Hudson  
New York City



## Diocese of New York

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP  
THE SYNOD HOUSE  
CATHEDRAL HEIGHTS, NEW YORK CITY

June 25th, 1941.

To the Rector, Vestry, and Congregation  
of Christ Church, Riverdale.

Dear Brethren:

The Seventy Fifth Anniversary of Christ Church is a notable event in the history of the Parish and it is an event of great interest to the Diocese and to the Community.

These years that you look back upon are filled with sacred memories and associations, they speak to you of trials and difficulties surmounted, of true spiritual growth and progress, of faithful service and witness for Our Lord and His Church.

And in this Day of Crisis in which we are living your Anniversary brings you a message of renewed faith, and courage, and trust in God, for Christ Church was never more spiritually awake, and its opportunity for spiritual ministry was never so great, as it is now.

In my own name and in the name of the Diocese I greet and congratulate you upon this Anniversary. May God's grace and blessing be with you and may the years to come be still more fruitful than the years that are past.

Faithfully and affectionately your Bishop,

William J. Manning

## PREFACE

A Seventy-fifth Anniversary is a matter of significance!

That an institution has survived the "sundry and manifold changes of the world" for three-quarters of a century is a tribute, both to those who brought it to birth, and to those who have nourished it.

The many who contributed to Christ Church of their time, their talents, and their means, have been co-workers with God. By their interest, His interests have been furthered, and, as a consequence, four generations in this community have been beneficiaries.

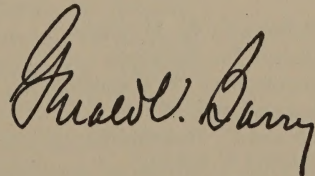
It is fitting that this history should serve as a memorial to them. It is, therefore, dedicated to the glory of God, in thanksgiving for their work in this parish.

Though rooted in the past, no institution may live in the past and survive. When life ceases to flow, death begins. Christ Church, then, must move forward into increasing service.

It is not wishful thinking which causes us to feel that a great future lies before us. To make the most of it, however, will require devotion. One cannot further anything in which one does not believe, or for which one is not willing to labor. If Christ Church is to become what we should like it to become, and what God would like it to become, we must begin within ourselves.

God has great expectations. He is ever optimistic—so optimistic that He was willing to give His Life for us, and to continue giving it through the Church's sacramental system. If we use that Life well, we can realize His Hopes. With His strength we can build a better world! Magnificent opportunity lies before us. Together let us grasp it!

In the midst of a changing, terrified world, let us not be indifferent, either to dangers or to possibilities. Let us build solidly upon the foundation of seventy-five years, using to the full the stabilizing forces and elevating influences available. Through this parish we are permitted to contribute something of incalculable value to our society.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Howard C. Barry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, flowing initial 'H'.

*Rector*



## RECTORS

Rev. Edward M. Pecke, LL.D. ....	1865-1866
Rev. George D. Wilds, D.D. ....	1867-1893
Rev. James Winthrop Hegeman, Ph.D. ....	1894-1901
Rev. Gustav A. Carstensen, Ph.D. ....	1902-1917
Rev. Glenn W. White, D.D. ....	1918-1931
Rev. Raymond E. Brock ....	1932-1936
Rev. Pryor McN. Grant ....	1936-1937
Rev. Gerald Van Osten Barry ....	1938-

## WARDENS

Henry L. Stone ....	1866-1895
Newton Carpenter ....	1866-1888
Clifton Bolton ....	1868-1870
Edward Prime ....	1870-1873
Joseph I. Bicknell ....	1873-1895
Moses Taylor Pyne ....	1895-1897
Clarence H. Wilds ....	1895-1898
Thomas N. Cuthbert ....	1897-1918
John D. Wood ....	1898-1899
George D. Eldridge ....	1900-1910
J. Lawrence Aspinwall ....	1904-1908
Alexander S. Webb ....	1911-1917
Edward C. Delafield ....	1917-1936
Frank S. Hackett ....	1918-
Geneste R. Taylor ....	1936-1936
Percival S. Wilds ....	1937-1941

## CLERKS

Thompson N. Hollister ....	1866-1872
Samuel D. Babcock ....	1872-1902
Thomas N. Cuthbert ....	1902-1918
Charles E. Hughes, Jr. ....	1918-1923
John W. Griffin ....	1923-1933
Charles A. Papenfuss ....	1933-1936
Albert E. Wheeler ....	1936-1939
Edgar Grim Miller, Jr. ....	1939-1940
James W. Angell ....	1940-

## TREASURERS

Thompson N. Hollister ....	1866-1872
Samuel D. Babcock ....	1872-1902
Gouverneur N. Carnochan ....	1902-1907
Alexander S. Webb ....	1907-1910
Edward C. Delafield ....	1910-1932
Percival S. Wilds ....	1932-1941
Edgar Grim Miller, Jr. ....	1941-



## VESTRYMEN

IN THE ORDER IN WHICH THEIR NAMES APPEAR IN THE MINUTES

Samuel D. Babcock  
Martin Bates  
George W. Knowlton  
William W. Thompson  
Thompson N. Hollister  
William H. Appleton  
Frederic Goodridge  
Henry F. Spaulding  
John S. Williams  
George S. Bend  
Edward D. Randolph  
Charles H. P. Babcock  
Joseph I. Bicknell  
George H. Foster  
Bowie Dash  
Lewis L. Delafield  
Moses Taylor Pyne  
Thomas B. Meeker  
John D. Wood  
Archibald D. Russell  
Percy R. Pyne  
Gouverneur M. Carnochan  
Orlando P. Dorham  
George E. Wyeth  
George D. Eldridge  
Clarence H. Wilds  
E. Read Goodridge  
J. Lawrence Aspinwall  
Grosvenor Eldridge  
S. P. Hutchinson  
William W. Appleton  
Randolph J. Lawrence  
F. Grosvenor Goodridge  
Lothrop Randolph  
Robert W. Milbank  
Frederick P. Delafield  
Guy B. Johnson  
Bertram D. Drake  
George W. McGill  
John M. High

William T. Eldridge  
Darwin P. Kingsley  
Edward C. Delafield  
Frederick W. Longfellow  
John Ross Delafield  
Archibald Douglas  
Frank S. Hackett  
Edwin B. Strange  
George B. Cortelyou  
Nicholas Kelley  
Reid L. Carr  
Charles E. Hughes, Jr.  
John W. Griffin  
William W. Niles  
Albert E. Wheeler  
Wallace P. Cohoe  
Ralph Schrenkeisen  
Edward P. Schell  
Percival S. Wilds  
John Warren Hill  
John W. Stafford  
Charles A. Papenfuss  
Raymond Hough  
Dr. James A. Corscaden  
Charles E. W. Hellerson  
George Browne  
Geneste R. Taylor  
Paul G. Rahe  
John M. High, Jr.  
Charles W. Schroter  
Acton Griscom  
Billings Wilson  
Edgar Grim Miller, Jr.  
James W. Angell  
Arthur H. Larson  
George F. Gunther  
Harold J. Lockwood  
Harvey Dann  
William F. Jacobi  
Stewart Schackne

## OFFICERS

The Rt. Rev. William T. Manning, *Bishop of New York*

The Rev. Gerald Van Osten Barry, *Rector*

## WARDENS

Frank S. Hackett

Percival S. Wilds

## VESTRYMEN

James W. Angell

George Browne

Dr. James A. Corscaden

Harvey Dann

Archibald Douglas

George F. Gunther

William F. Jacobi

Arthur Larson

Harold J. Lockwood

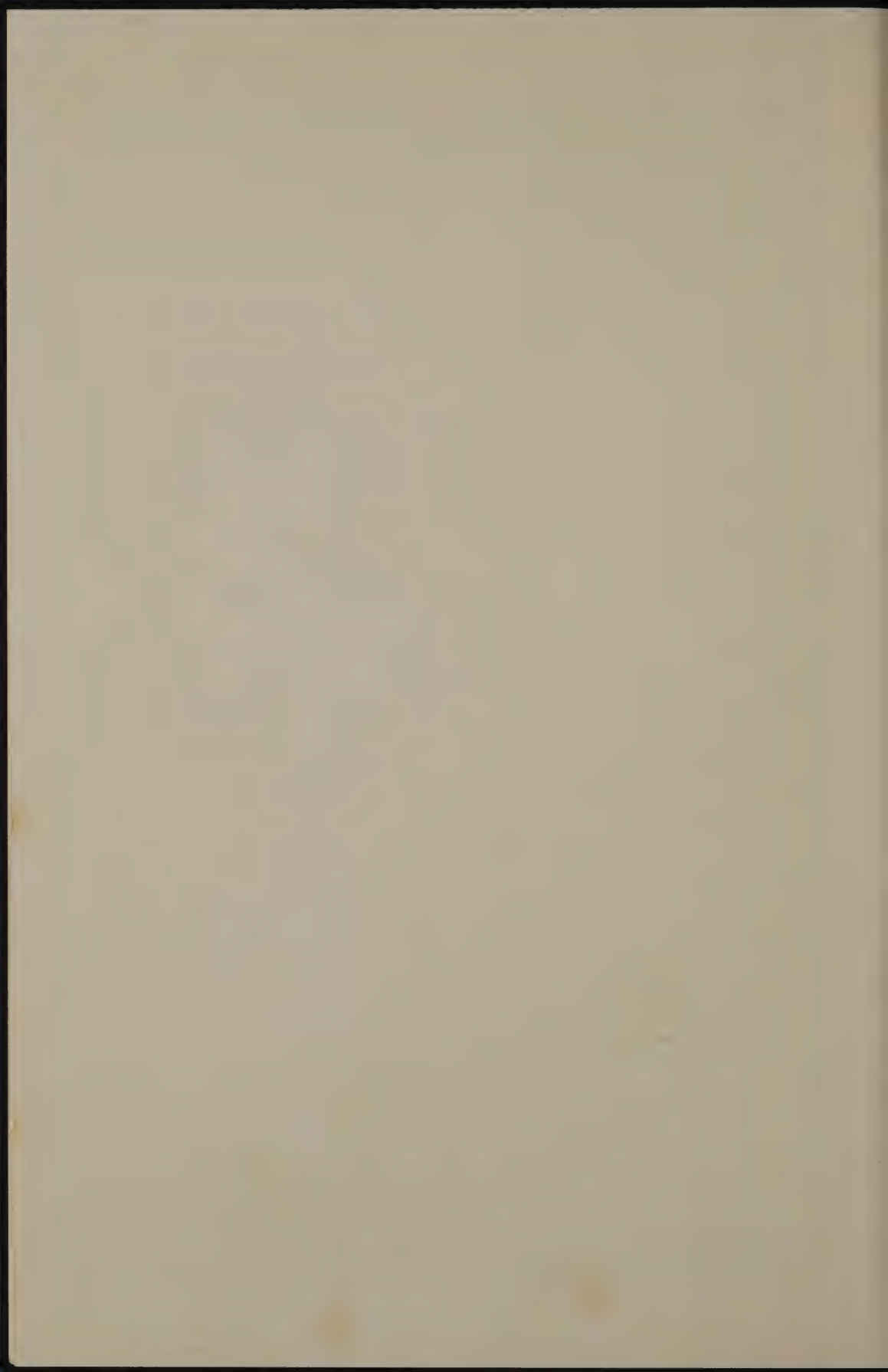
Edgar Grim Miller, Jr.

Charles A. Papenfuss

Stewart Schackne









## FOREWORD

Authors of this history are many. Parishioners and friends of Christ Church have contributed anecdotes, descriptions, memories. Residents of long standing in Riverdale have been visited in an effort to recapture a picture of the community as it once was. Actual records and correspondence of the Parish have been examined and from these sources this story has been compiled.

The purpose is to relate not only the history of Christ Church but also of Riverdale, for one is an integral part of the other. By fitting the Church into its proper scene, we may be able to direct its work more effectively and efficiently. If this history in any way facilitates the attainment of that purpose, it is more than justified.

This has been a corporate effort. It was not practical to include everything that was contributed; the problem was to select those threads which would weave the most harmonious pattern. We hope the errors and omissions are few in number, and for any we offer our apologies.

Lastly, we wish to acknowledge the work of three people whose efforts have been vital to the evolution of this history: Miss Gladys Bedford-Atkins, Mr. George Browne, Jr., Mr. Edward C. Delafield.

*The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Committee*



*Part of Riverdale, about 1870*



THE extreme northwest corner of New York City is probably the most rugged part of the City, and at one point reaches an elevation of 282 feet — the highest in the City. It is bounded on the east and west by Broadway and the Hudson River, by the Yonkers city line on the north, and by the Harlem Ship Canal on the south. Famous for fine old trees and splendid rock formations, Riverdale-on-Hudson is an oasis in a busy metropolis.

Indian tribes first occupied this area. They clustered in large settlements at the mouth of Shorack-Kappock, their name for Spuyten Duyvil Creek, and along the Nepperhan River. For a long time they had been the sole arbiters of the continent, but the elements of a decline were beginning to appear — a decline of which the *Half Moon*, as it dropped anchor in the beautiful, spacious bay in the month of September 1609, was a harbinger.

The Dutch were slow to follow up Hendrick Hudson's explorations, but in 1624 thirty Walloon families arrived. Two years later Peter Minuit concluded the famous transaction with the natives by which he purchased the island of Manhattan for twenty-four dollars' worth of beads and cloth. The colony prospered under the wise despotism of Peter Stuyvesant, and by 1664, could boast a population of about 10,000. In that same year England took possession of the colony by force, in order to unite the northern and southern halves of her American empire.

The Netherlands' officials, during their regime, had established in New Amsterdam the custom of bestowing large grants of land, known as patroonships, upon faithful servants. Adraien van der Donck, who had helped Governor Kieft negotiate an Indian treaty at Fort Orange (Albany), was the recipient in 1645 of such a grant; it included Riverdale and most of Yonkers. He became the "Patroon of the Colony of Nepperhaem, called by him Colendonck"; he erected a saw mill on the river, and used the level expanse (now the Van Cortlandt Park ball field) for the cultivation of his crops.

In 1666 the English authorities confirmed van der Donck's right to this land, and conveyed the title to his widow, by this time Mrs. Hugh O'Neale, who transferred the patent to her brother, Elias Doughty of Flushing, Long Island. He probably acted as a sort of Seventeenth century real estate agent, and disposed of the property for her. John Archer bought the southern portion, and created the Manor of Fordham. George Tippet purchased the land to the north

and gave his name to a pond and brook—a name that has since been corrupted to Tibbet's Pond and Brook.

One of the wealthiest colonists in New Amsterdam, Frederick Vlypse, was undoubtedly the most important purchaser of the old van der Donck land. He was an opportunist who rode the changing political winds with astonishing ease, and was completely impartial in his allegiance. He served the House of Orange and the House of Stuart with equal zeal, and followed a varied career which even included piracy. When he was finally convinced that the British would be dominant in the colony, he changed his name to Frederick Philipse. His was an acquisitive nature, and in 1672 he bought more land along the Hudson River. He gradually increased his holdings until they included Riverdale, Yonkers, Tarrytown, Croton, and Tappan on the other side of the river. This extensive accumulation was coalesced in 1693 into the Manor of Phillipsburgh. The southerly gatehouse of the Philipse Manor is the oldest house in modern Riverdale. It stands on the Albany Post Road at about 249th Street, and is owned by the W. R. Skillman estate. The westerly end of the south boundary of the Philipse Manor property can still be seen; it was marked by a stone wall of great boulders, part of which is just south of the Pfeiffer residence on Palisade Avenue. After Philipse's death in 1702, his family kept the inheritance intact. Members intermarried with local families of position, such as the Van Cortlandts, and eventually entered the peerage.

The Manor prospered as the number of tenants increased. It was a pioneer life; the saw-mill was the only industry, and the ground yielded a subsistence reluctantly. The Indians were troublesome; one contemporary writer termed them "a bad race of savages, who have always been very obstinate and unfriendly toward our people." In 1655 they rose up and devastated the entire region between the Croton and Harlem Rivers. The Indians gradually gave way, however, before the inexorable pressure of the white men, whose superior power insured their dominance. The population grew slowly but steadily.

The Manor settlement was, for all practical purposes, isolated from the thriving town some fourteen miles to the south. In 1667, a ferry, running between Manhattan and the Bronx, began operating near what is now First Avenue and 123rd Street. It did not attract travelers who had been accustomed to using "the wading place," a natural ford at Spuyten Duyvil which was free of toll. They continued to do so even though it necessitated tearing down fences put up at "the wading place" to divert their route to the ferry. In the summer of 1669 the ferry moved to Spuyten Duyvil: "a nearer and more convenient passage to and from the island and the Maine." By 1693 the increasing commerce between Manhattan and the main-



land warranted the construction of the King's Bridge from which the section subsequently took its name. It was built on a ninety-nine year franchise by Colonel Philipse, ever the man to turn a penny, honest or otherwise, and was operated as a toll-bridge by his grandson and great-grandson. Mrs. Sarah Knight, in her account of a trip on horseback from New York to Boston in 1704, states that on the first day "about 5, come to Spiting Devil, else King's Bridge, where they pay three pence for passing over with a horse, which, the man that keeps the gate set up at the end of the Bridge, receives."

Because of the tolls, the King's Bridge was unpopular with the farmers of the neighborhood who were obliged to use it in conveying their produce to the city. In 1756 Benjamin Palmer started a movement for a free bridge, and in spite of Philipse's opposition, a bridge was built from Jacob Dyckman's property on the city side to Thomas Vermilye's farm across the river. Dyckman's Bridge, or the Free Bridge, as it was dubbed at various times, was opened with a festive barbecue on New Year's Day 1759. Hundreds of people from New York City and Westchester County attended and "rejoiced greatly." A highway connecting with the Albany and Boston Post Roads was built from the Westchester end of the bridge. This attempt of the eighteenth century farmers to combat the privileges of the upper class, marks an early step toward the freedom for which they fought in 1776.

The impact of the Revolutionary War upon Riverdale thoroughly disrupted the community. For some time the colonies had been seething and using up their bellicose energies in debate. On May 15, 1776, the Continental Congress voted for independence. The time had come when the individual had to determine his allegiance, and in the decision, mingled emotions played an important part. One thing was now certain: suffering and deprivation were to be the lot of these people for the next few years.

Some like the Tippetts and the powerful Philipse family maintained their loyalty to the King; others, the Warners, Hadleys, and Valentines together with the Posts and the Van Cortlandts, espoused the cause of the Revolution. As soon as the news from Lexington and Concord penetrated to King's Bridge, the Van Cortlandts organized a militia, and in a moment of zealous, patriotic duty buried the Yonkers public records in the family vault.

The Riverdale sector was of strategic importance during the Revolution. In an effort to maintain communications between New York City and the country, the Continental Congress in June, 1775, caused a post of three hundred men to be stationed at Hyatt's tavern near the Free Bridge. General Washington himself visited Spuyten Duyvil the next year, and selected eight suitable sites for redoubts. On July

12, 1776, a few days after the publishing of the Declaration of Independence, two English ships of war, the *Rose* and the *Phoenix*, anchored in the Hudson off Spuyten Duyvil Creek, only to be fired on. The vessels moved north to a spot off Mount St. Vincent. There on the night of August 17th the local patriots, watched by Generals Heath and Clinton from the heights of Tippet's Hill, made a dramatic attempt to burn them, but the two boats fled. Whatever pride was felt in this accomplishment disappeared with the arrival of autumn. The English defeated the American forces in the Battle of Long Island, and compelled Washington to execute a masterly retreat through the Jerseys to Philadelphia and the terrible winter at Valley Forge. The path of the withdrawal lay through King's Bridge; the fortunes of the rebel inhabitants were at a low ebb.

New York City fell into the hands of the British, who retained it for the duration of the struggle. Along the southern part of the Riverdale sector, they constructed a series of forts from the Hudson across the Harlem. Fort Number Four, also known as Fort Independence, was in Spuyten Duyvil. Here some British, but chiefly Hessian, troops were garrisoned. The area to the north, the famous "neutral ground," became the scene of bitter civil war. In this region the rebel patriots, with Tarrytown as their base, and the organized Tories waged a savage guerilla warfare, using Valentine Hill, near Valentine Lane in Yonkers, as a common lookout point. Neither side could achieve a substantial victory over the other, and succeeded only in inflicting damage and sorrow on families and homes. The local folklore abounds in tales of masked, nocturnal intruders, of valiant women defending their hearths in the absence of their husbands, of murder and intrigue. Even the Indians were involved. When the Stockbridge tribes were defeated by Emery's English Chasseurs, they hid on the steep Riverdale hillside where the cavalry could not follow.

Neither the land nor the people saw peace or quiet until 1783, when the British forces withdrew. On November 12th of that year, George Washington passed the night at the Van Cortlandt mansion. The next day he rode victorious over the King's Bridge amid the cheers of the populace, on his way to a triumphant entry into the city and a subsequent meeting with his men at Fraunce's Tavern.

The war over, peace came only to those who had taken up the colonial cause. The Tories were forced to abandon their late homes and estates, and throw themselves upon the mercy of the now mentally unbalanced King of England, who was not often able or willing to reward their loyalty. Colonel Philipse was the greatest loser in Westchester. In 1779 the New York State Legislature issued a Bill of Attainder against him and his family. Commissioners of Forfeiture seized the land and sold it; the money realized was used to finance the



Revolution. Tenants had prior rights in the sale, but to what extent they were permitted to exercise their rights, it is difficult to determine.

The history of Riverdale after the Revolution is the story of the growth of small areas of economic enterprises fringing a large residential area. Spuyten Duyvil was a little hamlet in the neck of the Creek where an iron foundry and rolling mill began operations about 1867. Hudson Park and Riverdale itself were laid out as residential communities in 1853. By 1887 the latter had "two churches and a schoolhouse, but no places of business. . . ." Mosholu, the old Indian name for Tippet's Brook, consisted of a post office, a Methodist Church, a store, and a blacksmith and wagon shop. Yonkers was the most important development, and had its focal point at the Getty House where the Square now is.

Communications with New York City were at first of two kinds: by the sloop, *Ben Franklin*, which made three trips weekly and charged fifty cents; or by stagecoach, a quicker means of transportation but costing twice as much. In 1849 the Harlem River Railroad began operating between New York and Peekskill. Its advent doomed the New York-Albany stagecoach line. The fare from Yonkers to the city was twenty-five cents, and for the first week, stockholders rode free of charge. The invention of the steamboat increased river traffic. These were the halcyon days of steamboating so vividly depicted by Mark Twain. Accidents were frequent, and on July 28, 1852, Riverdale was the scene of one of the worst. On that day the *Henry Clay* decided to race a competitor, the *Armenia*, down the river. As the *Henry Clay* passed Yonkers, smoke was seen pouring from her sides. The steamer headed for the Riverdale dock, and ran up on the shore so that her bow lay across the railroad tracks. More than eighty passengers were drowned or burned to death, including Stephen Allen, a former Mayor of New York, and Miss Louisa Hawthorne, sister of the noted American novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Ackerman home in Riverdale was used as a temporary hospital, and inquests were held in the Yonkers railroad station. Many of the bodies were buried in St John's Cemetery, Yonkers, where a marble monument was erected over their graves.

Politically, Riverdale was a part of the township of Yonkers until 1872, when the New York State Legislature created the City of Yonkers at its present boundaries. The section to the south, including Riverdale, became the township of Kingsbridge although the name, Fieldston, was almost chosen. Two years later, the entire township was annexed to the City of New York as the Twenty-fourth Ward.

It did not look much like a city; it was a rural area divided up into large estates with fine homes. Men of prominence in the business world, like the Delafields (banking) or the Kingsleys (insurance),

set up permanent residences in Riverdale. They in turn induced many of their acquaintances to establish their homes in the community. The population did not consist entirely of financiers; the literary world was ably represented by Mark Twain. Thus a landed gentry of wealth and position became the dominant class in Riverdale.

The average estate was between six and eighteen acres although there were some much larger. The Delafield holdings, which date from 1829, extended from the Hudson River across Riverdale Avenue, which divided the district, to the Albany Post Road. The homes were of a style and size that was in keeping with the position of their owners. The following advertisement from the *Yonkers Statesman* of January 12, 1865 is an excellent description of a typical residence of the period:

For Sale — At Yonkers, on Palisade Avenue, a HANDSOME COUNTRY SEAT. House double walls; heated by steam; hot and cold water; bath rooms and water closets; gas; burglar alarm. One and a half acres of ground; fruit and shade trees; grapery; with choice and rare wines. Ice house; stable—all in perfect order. Views unsurpassed—commanding the village, Palisades, Hudson River, New York, Jersey City, and Staten Island.

For Particulars inquire of  
JAMES YOUMANS, No. 4 Dock Street

Riverdale retained an exclusively residential character for a long time. Citizens united in a common purpose to preserve its natural beauty against the encroachments of the city. Well groomed horses and smart carriages, occupied by prim ladies in frills and old lace, rode the length of Riverdale Avenue, the unpaved but main thoroughfare. The parson, making his parish rounds on horseback, was not an unusual sight. Local springs poured into little racing brooks, and provided the drinking water. There were enough ponds for skating in winter, and at least one was deep enough for swimming in summer. Innumerable orchards and vineyards completed the idyllic picture.

The homeowners of Riverdale were intensely proud of their locality, and formed protective associations not only to aid its physical development by building new roads and installing sewerage facilities, but also by maintaining it as a restricted zone. As the catalogue of the Riverdale Institute, a girls' seminary, pointed out: "Riverdale is not a public town, with a mixed population, but the chosen home of a few families. Though so near the city, the situation is entirely sequestered, and is one of the most healthful and picturesque on the banks of the River."



As time went on, over ten percent of the section was given over to educational institutions. The first school in this area opened in 1772 as a French boarding school with Dominie Tetard as master. Other institutions subsequently took root but failed to live up to their initial promise. Today Riverdale can boast of several excellent centers of learning, mere enumeration of which cannot do justice to them: Riverdale Country School, Barnard School for Boys, Horace Mann School for Boys, Fieldston School, St. Margaret's Parochial School, Manhattan College.

The largest institution of all is the College of Mount St. Vincent founded in 1847 by the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. The college moved here in 1857 when Edwin Forrest, the gifted American tragedian, sold them at a nominal cost his ninety-six acre estate in Riverdale. Other buildings were erected around Font Hall, the Forrest residence built in the style of a medieval castle much admired by Mrs. Forrest. In addition to the College, the Sisters maintain Seton Hospital in Spuyten Duyvil, and a convent for the instruction of novices of the Order.

Riverdale residents have always given careful thought to the needs of the community. Public spiritedness, such as that manifested by Miss Grace Dodge and her brother, Cleveland H. Dodge, in organizing and supporting the Neighborhood Library, has rarely been wanting, and it is this attitude which was chiefly responsible for the establishment of Christ Church at the time of the Civil War.

THE religious history of New York and vicinity begins with the Dutch Reformed Church—a church which, although modified to meet new conditions, continued to minister to its people after the English conquest. The Church of England was introduced by army chaplains who accompanied the British troops to America. At first the building of the Dutch Reformed Church was used for their services, but soon they erected their own chapel, and in 1696 built a church on the present site of Trinity. The English government fostered the Anglican Church, and through gifts of land, Trinity Parish soon became financially secure. In 1700 there were in New York:

- 29 Dutch Reformed Churches
- 13 Presbyterian Churches
- 1 Parish of the Church of England
- 7 Miscellaneous.

The number of Church of England parishes, however, quickly increased. Two factors determined their rapid expansion: the continued support of the English authorities, and the activities of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, founded in 1701 by the Reverend Thomas Bray. This organization conducted what was probably the most successful missionary work in America. To New York alone in the colonial period, it sent about fifty-eight missionaries who devoted their lives not only to the spiritual welfare of their countrymen in the new world, but what to them was probably more important, to the conversion of the heathen Indians. A letter written in 1740 by the Reverend Samuel Johnson, D.D., first President of King's College (later Columbia), to the Archbishop of Canterbury is evidence that these toilers in the Lord's vineyard were sorely needed in Riverdale:

The next thing is to give your Grace an account of those places where missions are wanted. And here I beg leave first to mention a great part of the province, I mean all the tract on the east side of the Hudson River from Westchester upwards, quite as far as we have any settlements, abounding with people, but almost destitute of ministers of any denomination, except two Dutch and two German, and many people have almost lost all sense of Christianity. Indeed in the large county of West-



chester, there is only good Mr. Wetmore and two dissenting teachers, that are capable of duty. Northward of that is Colonel Philipse's Manor, in which are people enough for a large congregation, without any minister at all. The Colonel has himself built a neat small church, and set off a tract for a glebe, which will be considerable in time, and he and his tenants are very desirous of a minister, but will need the Society's assistance.

The Society was quick to respond to such cries as this.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the nearest place of worship to Riverdale was the Dutch Reformed Church in the Manor of Fordham. Anglican divines paid brief and sporadic visits to this locality, at which time one of the farmers would invite his neighbors to gather in his house or barn, "when empty," for the service. It was not until 1787 that the Yonkers Episcopal Society was organized with Augustus Van Cortlandt and John Warner as its first trustees. And in 1795 "St. John's Church in the town of Yonkers" was formally incorporated. For more than half a century the people of Riverdale were a part of this congregation. The original buildings have yielded to the ravages of time, but St. John's is still an active parish.

In the nineteenth century the religious activity in South Yonkers, as this neighborhood was also called, was carried on first by a group of Methodists who began their work in 1826. Some of the private families, such as Major Delafield's, members of the Episcopal Church, engaged students from The General Theological Seminary, located in Chelsea Square, as religious instructors for their children. Until 1852 St. John's in Yonkers was the only parish of the Episcopal Church within a radius of ten miles. Within the next few years six new parishes were formed and separated from the parent church without disturbing in the least the size of the latter's congregation. One of the earliest indications of this change occurred in lower Riverdale.

For some time there had been considerable agitation among the peoples of Fordham and Kingsbridge for the erection of a church. Location was the stumbling block: the Fordham people did not care to come down into the valley; and the Kingsbridge people did not want to climb the hill; finally each group determined to have its own church. On August 15, 1855, the parish of the Church of the Mediator was formed in Kingsbridge. It was completed in 1858 and dedicated on November 6, 1864, since which date it has continued to minister faithfully to the religious needs of its members. In 1863 the Presbyterians, motivated by the same desire for a place where they could worship God in their own way, built their church, which was formally dedicated on the eleventh of October of that year.

This was the religious situation in Riverdale at the time of the Civil War. Members of the Episcopal Church had the choice of going either down to the Church of the Mediator or up to St. John's in Yonkers. Evidently neither practice was satisfactory. The establishment of Christ Church was the ultimate solution, and the motive behind its conception was probably a combination of geographical convenience and a genuine desire that the community should have a parish of its own.

This idea ripened during a time of great struggle, when the nation was striving to preserve its unity. When the idea finally blossomed, the country was still in a state of chaos and confusion: the war was over and the Union preserved; but the leader had been martyred, and the people were now bitterly reviling his successor. The times were such that the need for a church and its leadership was obvious if the faith and sanity of the nation were to be restored.

The actual history of the formation of Christ Church goes back some four years before its dedication. In the summer of 1862 a resident of Riverdale, William D. Babcock, was traveling on the Mississippi River engaged on a "peaceable and lawful commercial errand." This border zone, long the habitat of ruffian elements of society who moved like water-soaked logs up and down the river, a part of its flotsam and jetsam, was made all the more turbulent by the Civil War. It was not a place where citizens, however "peaceable and lawful," could proceed on their travels with any assurance of safety. Mr. Babcock became forcibly aware of the danger of his situation when he met a band of guerilla soldiers — who killed him!

A part of this gentleman's estate included a mansion and about seven acres of land in Riverdale, back of where Christ Church now stands. His neighbors and friends took the opportunity of purchasing the estate and using it for the establishment of a school for their children. On October 19, 1863, the Riverdale Institute opened as a "Collegiate School for Young Ladies."

There was also some sentiment among the patrons of the school to associate a church with it by building one at the entrance to the grounds of the Institute. Mr. Babcock's son, a prominent banker and financier, was the leader of the movement. Under his guidance a group of people, "who throughout all their lives had been the recipients of rich pecuniary blessings," met in the autumn of 1864, and resolved "to build a fit and proper Temple for the worship of Almighty God, appropriate to the surrounding circumstances, and to the wealth of the neighborhood, and that it should be called 'Christ Church, Riverdale.'"

The money for the construction liberally subscribed and the land acquired, excavating began in April, 1865. The firm of Richard



Upjohn & Company was engaged as architects. The man who organized this company was probably the foremost ecclesiastical architect in the United States. The first important commission of his career was the reconstruction of Trinity Church in 1846; the last was the designing of St. Thomas' Church a few years after the completion of Christ Church. Built of locally quarried stone, Christ Church is essentially Gothic in style, but it is a Gothic modified by Victorian and rural influences. This blend has created a balance in which whatever was heavy and massive in one, is offset by the charm and grace of the other. The addition in 1872 of the Rectory and some more land, largely the gift of Mrs. Frederic Goodridge, completed the unity and harmony of the picture.

The interior of the Church was also carefully conceived. The creation of the Chancel windows was entrusted to the English artist, Wailes, who received the following injunction from a member of the Building Committee:

It should be kept in the mind of the artist that there is less of dark and cloudy weather in the United States compared with England and that for this reason his tone of color should be nearly a shade fuller than for English windows.

The other windows, with one exception, were the work of an American artist: Doremus of Mount Clare (Montclair), New Jersey. The exception was the large, beautiful window in the north transept which, installed at a cost of 25,000 francs by Percy R. Pyne in memory of his mother, was the creation of the French artist: Oudinot.

Others also have desired to perpetuate some cherished memory, and through the years the Church has gathered a treasured collection of these memorials. A partial\* list of those whose existence is thus commemorated follows:

Emily Speir Arnold  
Mary Worthen Appleton  
Cornelia Fulton Babcock  
Edward Charles Babcock  
Charles H. P. Babcock  
Jeremiah Lester Case  
Emma Larson Compton  
Charlotte Morrison Crawford  
Jeannette Titus Crawford  
Maturin L. and Mary Delafield  
Irving Emery  
Evelyn Gagnon

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\*Partial, because not all memorials bear identifying information.

Kate Appleton Geary  
Frederic M. and Charlotte Goodridge  
Pryor McNeill Grant  
Frances Allen Hackett  
Robert Hamilton  
Lily Douglas Hayter  
John M. High  
Ann Pyne  
Philip L. Schell  
Martin Sontag  
Theodore Booth Strange  
Agnes Randall Brune Wills  
John Dunn Wood  
William Neals Whipple  
Emily Julia White  
George D. Wilds  
Kate Billings Wilson  
William Hanna Wilson  
E. C. B.  
M. R. B.  
P. B.

Although the total cost amounted to \$43,828.98, the building was quickly constructed without borrowing any money. On September 10, 1866, the congregation came together for the first time in order to incorporate as a religious society as required by the Acts of the Legislature of the State of New York. The Reverend Edward M. Pecke presided at that time and, because he was superintendent of the Riverdale Institute, became the Church's first Rector. His period of service ended shortly thereafter on June 25, 1867.

A few days after that meeting, the parishioners and interested friends of Christ Church received the following invitation:

#### CONSECRATION

The Bishop of the Diocese proposes to consecrate "Christ Church, Riverdale," on Wednesday, October 10th, 1866. Services to commence at 11 A.M.

You are invited to be present.

Riverdale-on-Hudson  
October 1st, 1866.

The 10 A.M. Express Train from 30th Street will stop at Riverdale. Returning trains, 3:52 and 6.20 P. M.



The Bishop of New York, the Right Reverend Horatio Potter, officiated. Bishop Talbot of Indiana and fifteen members of the lesser clergy also were present and participated in the service which consisted of Morning Prayer, a Litany, and the Order for Holy Communion. Bishop Potter preached the sermon, and Bishop Talbot made an address. The *Yonkers Statesman* covered the event and recorded the proceedings for the public the next day. "The consecration of this beautiful church," the item read, "took place yesterday with all the usual and solemn and impressive dedication ceremonies of the Protestant Episcopal Church." After referring to the Bishop's sermon as "eloquent," the reporter went on to say, "The Church was crowded to excess, and this occasion will be long remembered by the citizens of Riverdale." It is remembered by at least one person who still is living today: Jane Miller Daniels, a ninety-four year old resident of St. John's Episcopal Home in Yonkers.

Christ Church, now dedicated to its high purpose, immediately took up the task of consolidating the newly formed parish. The first years were comparatively tranquil. The Reverend George D. Wilds, D.D., an alumnus of Harvard University, remained Rector for more than a quarter of a century. That he was genuinely loved and admired by the members of his congregation was forcefully demonstrated by their resolve to give him a monthly pension of \$200 when he retired.

The successor to Dr. Wilds was the Reverend James Winthrop Hegeman, Ph.D., a church scholar and a widely traveled man. He was responsible for the idea of recruiting a boys' choir from the Leake and Watts' Home School as well as from the parish families — a practice which has continued up to the present day almost without interruption. Originally the total membership of the choir was fourteen boys who arrived in a stagecoach each Sunday morning in time for the service. Today it numbers more than thirty voices strong, and comes to church in a "meat wagon," as the vehicle is known among the boys.

Dr. Hegeman's stay in Riverdale was brief, and in 1902 the Reverend Gustav A. Carstensen, Ph.D., became Rector. Also a scholar and devoted priest, Dr. Carstensen, in addition, had a delightful imagination, which made him the special friend of children. For fifteen years, assisted by his gracious wife and daughter, he served the parish; at length resigning to become Rector of Holy Rood, a much larger parish on Washington Heights.

The financial problems of Christ Church through the rectorship of the Reverend Glenn W. White, were typical of the community in which it was situated, and of the men and women who comprised the membership. The congregation had been wealthy, and had distributed largesse in a generous manner. The chief source of income

was from pew rentals, and this subject forms the major part of the Church's records and correspondence. Even as late as 1932 Christ Church still collected pew rents. In 1900, with a seating capacity of 255, the Church had only sixty free sittings.

The character of Riverdale began to change, however, and the key to the change is to be found in a letter written to a member of the congregation by a weary treasurer in 1904:

We have had the hardest kind of struggle to keep our heads above water, and only hope that we can continue to do so.

Since the deaths of the wealthier members of our little congregation, the burdens have become harder and harder to bear.

Deaths and removals from Riverdale were the underlying causes for a decline in church activity. Fewer people could afford to rent pews and make up deficits. By 1916 attendance at the Sunday services had fallen off to such an alarming extent that the entire economy of the Church was seriously threatened.

The return of financial prosperity after the first World War and during the administration of the Reverend Glenn W. White, eased the pressure somewhat without clearing up the basic situation. Although the voluntary pledge system had come to replace pew rentals as the most important source of income, the Church continued to rely upon a minority of the congregation for the main financial support. At the time, this support was ample, and an atmosphere of opulence pervaded the parish. So much so that in 1923 the Vestry authorized the construction of a Parish house. There had long been a desire for this, but the Vestry had hesitated about embarking on such an expensive project. As it was, the completed structure, designed by Dwight James Baum, cost \$30,000, of which sum the congregation raised half, and the balance was secured by a mortgage which gradually has been paid in full.

In 1931 Dr. White resigned as rector of Christ Church. In his letter of resignation he spoke of the "heavy responsibilities of any rectorship," and went on to say that "in this growing parish, these responsibilities become greater and greater every day." They were particularly heavy in 1931. The stock market crash two years earlier had its repercussions in Riverdale as elsewhere. Once affluent parishioners were no longer in a position to support the Church as handsomely as before.

The Reverend Raymond E. Brock was confronted with this unpleasant state of affairs when he took over the parish in 1932. His first task was to build up the congregation. He began by re-organizing the Vestry. The number of Vestrymen was increased from eight to twelve,









the number canonically required. The parish itself was studied. Community lists were checked in an effort to find people who might be interested in associating themselves with Christ Church. The Every Member Canvas became an annual effort to induce parishioners to take a keener interest in the affairs of the Church. Men and women, who heretofore had taken little or no part in the work of the Church, were persuaded to assume part of the responsibility. When Mr. Brock resigned in 1936, he left certain definite foundations upon which the parish could build; that he accomplished as much as he did under the circumstances is to his lasting credit. The work has continued, and a comparison of the Parochial Report of 1900 with that of 1940 discloses what progress has been made. The number of baptized persons in the parish in 1940 was almost twice as many as in 1900, and the number of communicants showed a similar increase.

In the brief year that followed Mr. Brock's departure, there was an important growth in another direction. At this critical juncture, Christ Church secured a man who enriched the parish many fold. All those who have ministered were faithful men of God, preaching the Gospel in the light of their own beliefs; and for their work, they deserve the fullest praise. Still it is fitting at this time of celebration to single out this one man, whose precious influence is yet at work, and render him special tribute. The Reverend Pryor McNeill Grant was never a passive member of the Church; the work that he did was the Church in action. Whether he was reclaiming young men from the wayward path and restoring them to a fuller, more wholesome life, or whether he was caring for the religious needs of Riverdale itself, he brought to both a zeal and ardor that few could resist. He inspired so much love within those around him, that his gentle wish became a command which one felt honored to obey. There may have been some goals which Pryor Grant failed to attain, but the totality of his life was anything but a failure. He seemed to be a fountain fed by an eternal spring; all who drank from it were refreshed. On the lapel of his coat he wore the emblem of "Toc H,"\* on which a lighted lamp of classic design was engraved. The lamp symbolised the bearer. Through him it shed its ray into the darkest corners; never was it hidden under a bushel. Pryor Grant let this light so shine that he glorified his Father which is in Heaven.

His sudden death in 1937 deprived not only Riverdale but the world at large of one of its more vital forces. He lived on a high spiritual plane, and it is fitting that the Chapel in the south transept, instituted by the Young People's Fellowship, is in memory of him. It is the devout desire of the present Rector to preserve a balance between the spiritual ideal, which Pryor Grant represented, and the human need of keeping the Church on a firm, enduring basis.

\*An organization which was born during the last World War, and which, since has carried on a remarkably effective type of personal service.



## EPILOGUE

**A**FTER seventy-five years continuity of service in Riverdale, it is proper that Christ Church should study the community of which it is a part and evaluate the role it should play in the future. The face of the locality has changed considerably; its pattern is being etched along different lines. Not only has the Riverdale of 1866 vanished forever, but the Riverdale that the present generation knew and understood, is also yielding to unrelenting forces which are creating new problems and new conditions.

In 1860 French's *Gazeteer* described this section as "a group of villas and a R.R. station." Today it has become a very real part of the city. The population is steadily expanding northward, and the marked increase in apartment house construction in the neighborhood is calculated to take care of a part of that expansion. Riverdale is in the process of being urbanized, and, ironically enough, is bisected by a great arterial highway which carries the modern city dweller through it to the country of Connecticut and New York.

Christ Church must prepare to confront these new conditions. The spiritual problems that are sure to arise will originate not only in an urbanized Riverdale, but also in the confusion that is a part of the current international scene. In times of war and rumors of war, the role of the Church becomes even more vitally important. To a world upset by the repudiation of principles and morals, it offers eternal values whereby we may govern our thinking.

In 1966 this parish will celebrate its centenary. It would be a rash person, indeed, who would dare prophesy concerning the next twenty-five years. Our purpose is to build an enduring structure no matter what obstacles the future may place in our path. That structure will have to be erected upon spiritual foundations with due allowance for

human frailty. If this parish is to render service to God and to man twenty-five years hence — if it is to survive — we will have to formulate plans which coincide with the design of God. That process must begin within individuals; each must open himself to receive the Life of God. Those of us to whom it has been given to cultivate the soil of God in Riverdale, must use His tools, and develop in the use of His techniques. When we honestly try to do that, we find strength in the assurance that Christ Church will be performing the most valuable function any organization can possibly perform. Whatever may be the structure of society in 1966, we may be certain that there will be people with yearnings for something better than they know, and that there will be a loving Father Who desires that they possess it.

That our successors will want to make response to God in worship is also certain, and a structure dedicated to God, fitly furnished, will be required. Over the past seventy-five years a steady procession of souls have benefited because of the foresight and planning of those who founded this parish. They provided the edifice in which we worship, and, through the disposition of their worldly goods, insured its continuing operation. This generation cannot do less. At this time of celebration it is not merely fitting but imperative that, with the centenary as a goal, we turn our thoughts toward providing for the future security of the Church.

Meanwhile, whatever may be our plans for the coming years, we go forward. We go forward in the service of Jesus Christ. We go forward in the service of our fellow men. Only as we commit ourselves to God and plot our course in accordance with our very best interpretation of His Will, can we serve either Him or our fellow men. He is our Foundation; He is our Strength, our Companion, and our Goal.

In the month of October 1941 Christ Church re-dedicates itself to Him to Whom it was dedicated seventy-five years ago — Jesus Christ.

## 75th ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE

Mr. Frank S. Hackett, *Chairman*

Mr. James W. Angell

William Barbour, Jr.

Mr. and Mrs. George Browne, Sr.

Mr. George Browne, Jr.

Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Dann

Mr. Edward C. Delafield

Mr. Archibald Douglas

Mr. and Mrs. John W. Griffin

Mrs. John H. Iselin

Mr. William Jacobi

Mrs. Ernest Janelli

Mr. Arthur H. Larson

Mrs. Graham Livingston

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Murphy

Mr. Charles A. Papenfuss

Mr. Stewart Schackne

Mr. and Mrs. Albert E. Wheeler

Mr. and Mrs. Percival Wilds



FORM OF BEQUEST

*I Give and bequeath to*

CHRIST CHURCH, RIVERDALE-ON-HUDSON

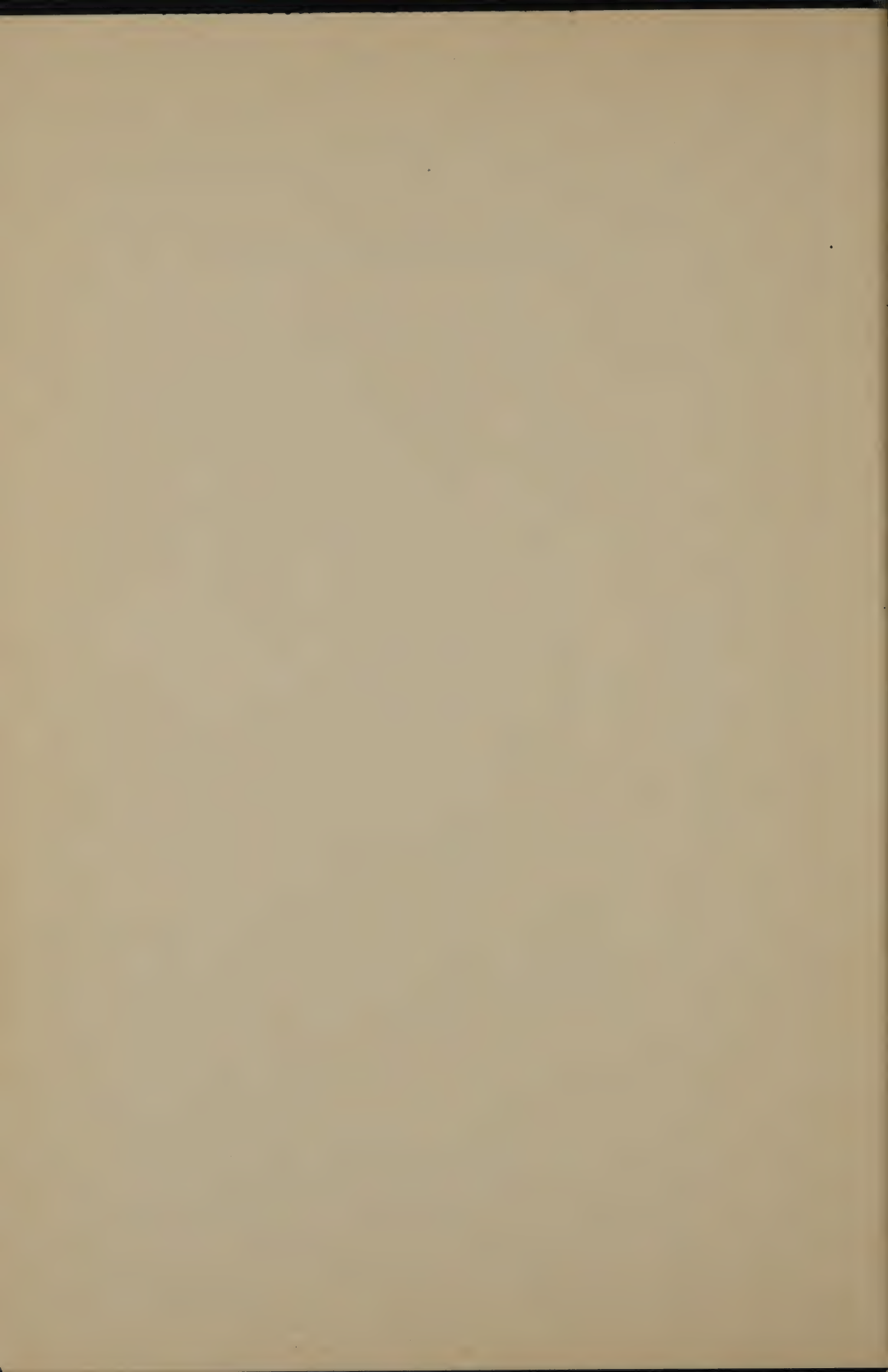
NEW YORK CITY

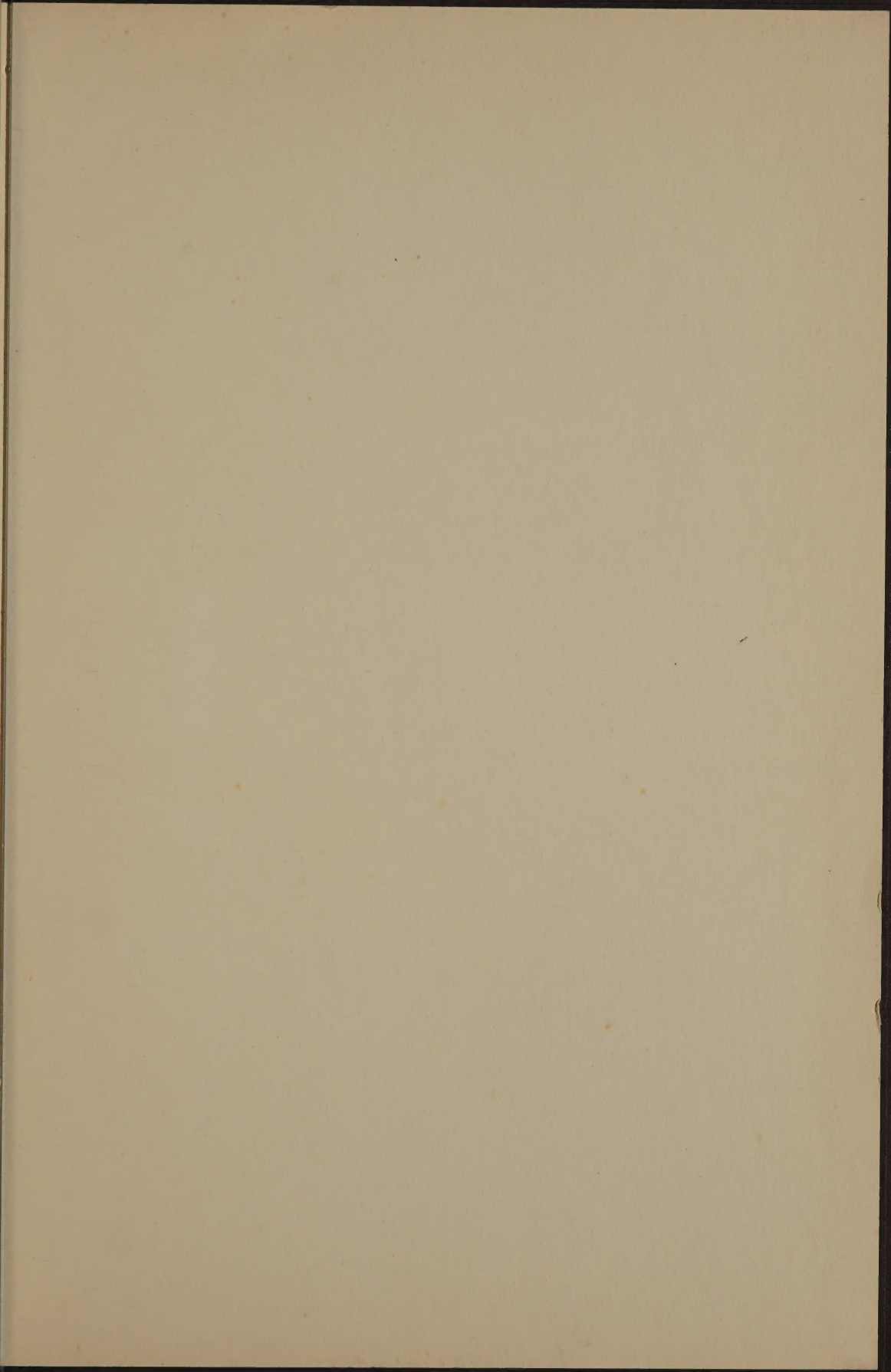
*a corporation organized under the laws of the State of New York,  
the sum of*

.....Dollars

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SIGNATURE

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DATE







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